CLAIMS

1. A client device, comprising:

a connection interface operable to connect to a server through a network;

a receiver operable to receive content data for displaying content;

a data storage unit operable to store icon identification data sets that each corresponds to a different icon;

a display unit operable to display the content based on the content data, and to display icon buttons that represent the icons;

a selection unit enabling a first user to select a desired one of the icon buttons; and

a transmitter operable to transmit a request to the server, the request including the icon identification data set that corresponds to the icon represented by the selected icon button, and a command that the server transmit the icon identification data set to another client device connected to the server.

2. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the data storage unit stores icon display and audio data for executing the icons that correspond to the icon identification data sets.

3. A client device as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a data receiver operable to receive icon display and audio data from the server, the icon display and audio data being for executing the icons that correspond to the icon

identification data sets.

4. A client device as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a data receiver operable to connect to the Internet and to receive, over the Internet, icon display and audio data for executing the icons that correspond to the icon identification data sets.

5. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the display unit displays a buddy list superimposed over the content, the buddy list indicating on-line status of other client devices connected to the server.

6. A client device as claimed in claim 5, wherein the display unit switches from display of the buddy list to display of a visual clue that is smaller than the buddy list, the visual clue indicating on-line status of the other client devices connected to the server.

7. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the command indicates a group of the client devices to which the server is to transmit the icon identification data set.

8. A client device as claimed in claim 7, wherein the icon identification data set corresponds to an icon that represents a comment on the content and that offers users of the group of client devices possible responses to the comment.

9. A client device as claimed in claim 8, further comprising a response receiver operable to receive the responses to the comment from the group of client devices, the display unit displaying a result of the responses.

10. A client device as claimed in claim 7, wherein the icon identification data set corresponds to an icon

representing a question and possible answers.

11. A client device as claimed in claim 10, further comprising an answer receiver operable to receive the answers to the question from the group of client devices, the display unit displaying a result of the answers.

12. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the display unit displays selected content, and the icon identification data set corresponds to an icon that invites a user of the another client device to watch the selected content.

13. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the icon identification data set corresponds to an icon that represents a comment on the content and that offers a user of the another client device possible responses to the comment.

14. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the icon identification data set corresponds to an icon representing a social interaction having only a single possible positive response.

15. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the display unit displays selected content, and the selected icon button represents an invitation icon for inviting a user of the another client device to watch the selected content.

16. A client device as claimed in claim 15, wherein the selected content is broadcast content.

17. A client device as claimed in claim 15, wherein the selected content is pay content.

18. A client device as claimed in claim 17, wherein when the first user selects the desired icon button using the

selection unit, the display unit displays an interface that provides the first user an option of paying fees for the pay content for the user of the another client device.

19. A client device as claimed in claim 17, wherein the pay content is pay per view.

20. A client device as claimed in claim 17, wherein the pay content is video on demand.

21. A client device as claimed in claim 15, wherein the command transmitted by the transmitter also commands the server to transmit an invitation to devices other than client devices.

22. A client device as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a chat unit operable to communicate with other client devices in a chat group and to control the display unit to display the content and chat text based on data from the other client devices in the chat group, the command transmitted by the transmitter commanding the server to transmit the icon identification data set to the other client devices in the chat group.

23. A client device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the display unit displays the icon buttons superimposed on the content.

24. A method of interactive television communication between a plurality of client devices connected to a server through a network, comprising:

receiving over the network from the client devices information on a television viewing status of the client devices;

preparing a buddy list of client devices for one of the client devices, the buddy list including the information on the television viewing status of the client devices in the buddy list;

sending the information on the television viewing status of the client devices in the buddy list over the network to the one client device;

receiving a request over the network from the one client device to execute a desired icon at a particular client device in the buddy list; and

sending icon identification data corresponding to the desired icon over the network to the particular client device in the buddy list.

25. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the one client device displays selected content, and the icon identification data corresponds to an icon that invites a user of the particular client device in the buddy list to watch the selected content.

26. A method as claimed in claim 25, further comprising:

receiving an agreement to watch the selected content from the particular client device in the buddy list; and

communicating with the one client device and the particular client device in the buddy list to synchronize display of the selected content at the one client device and the particular client device in the buddy list.

27. A method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the selected content is broadcast content.

28. A method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the

selected content is pay content.

29. A method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising charging fees for the pay content for the particular client device to the one client device when the request indicates that a user of the one client device has agreed to pay the fees for the pay content for the particular client device.

30. A method as claimed in claim 28, wherein the pay content is pay per view.

31. A method as claimed in claim 28, wherein the pay content is video on demand.

32. A method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising discounting fees charged to the one client device for the pay content when the user of the particular client device has agreed to pay for the pay content for the particular client device.

33. A method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising providing incentive points to the one client device when the user of the particular client device agrees to pay for the pay content for the particular client device.

34. A method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising receiving agreement-to-pay information from the particular client device when the user of the particular client device has agreed to pay for the pay content for the particular client device.

35. A method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising sending further icon identification data to the particular client device when the user of the particular client device has not agreed to pay for the pay content for the particular

client device, the further icon identification data identifying an icon at the particular client device for urging the user of the particular client device to pay for the pay content for the particular client device.

36. A method as claimed in claim 25, further comprising:

searching by the server for an online device having a user who is the same as the user of the particular client device when the particular client device is not online; and

sending from the server to the online device an invitation to watch the selected content.

37. A method as claimed in claim 25, further comprising exchanging chat text between client devices in a chat group, wherein the icon identification data is transmitted from the one client device to other client devices in the chat group.

38. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the information on the television viewing status includes information indicating which of the client devices in the buddy list are displaying the same television programs.

39. A method as claimed in claim 24, further comprising receiving from the particular client device in the buddy list a response indicating execution of the desired icon.

40. A method as claimed in claim 39, wherein the icon identification data represents an icon having a comment about television content, and the response represents agreement or disagreement with the comment.

41. A method as claimed in claim 39, wherein the icon identification data represents an icon having a question and possible answers, and the response represents one of the

possible answers.

42. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the icon identification data represents an expression.

43. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the icon identification data represents information about a television program.

44. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the icon identification data represents advertisement information.

45. A method as claimed in claim 24, further comprising sending a command with the icon identification data, the command instructing the particular client device in the buddy list to execute an icon corresponding to the icon identification data using icon display and audio data stored locally in the particular client device in the buddy list.

46. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the icon identification data includes icon display and audio data for executing the desired icon in the particular client device in the buddy list.

47. A method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the request from the one client device includes a request to execute the desired icon at a group of client devices watching the same television content.

48. A method as claimed in claim 47, wherein the group of client devices includes client devices not in the buddy list.

49. A method as claimed in claim 24, further comprising suggesting icons to the client devices in the buddy list.

50. A method of interactive television communication

between a plurality of client devices connected to a server through a network, comprising:

receiving content data at a first one of the client devices;

displaying content based on the content data received at the first one of the client devices;

displaying icon buttons each representing a different icon;

selecting one of the icon buttons representing a desired icon;

sending a request from the first one of the client devices to the server, the request instructing that the desired icon be executed at another one of the client devices;

receiving the request at the server over the network;

sending icon identification data corresponding to the desired icon over the network to the another one of the client devices;

receiving the icon identification data at the another one of the client devices; and

executing the desired icon at the another one of the client devices based on the icon identification data.

51. A method as claimed in claim 50, further comprising storing in the client devices icon display and audio data for executing icons, the icon identification data indicating the icon display and audio data for executing the desired icon.

52. A method as claimed in claim 50, wherein the step of sending icon identification data includes sending icon display and audio data for executing the desired icon at the another

one of the client devices.

53. A method as claimed in claim 50, further comprising connecting the server to the Internet and receiving, over the Internet, icon display and audio data for executing icons, the server sending selected icon display and audio data for executing the desired icon with the icon identification data.

54. A method as claimed in claim 50, further comprising connecting the another one of the client devices to the Internet and receiving, over the Internet, icon display and audio data for executing the desired icon.

55. A method as claimed in claim 50, wherein the first one of the client devices displays selected content, and the icon identification data corresponds to an icon that invites a user of the another one of the client devices to watch the selected content.

56. A method as claimed in claim 55, wherein the selected content is broadcast content.

57. A method as claimed in claim 55, wherein the selected content is pay content.

58. A method as claimed in claim 57, further comprising executing, at the another one of the client devices, a confirmation icon that informs the user that the selected content is pay content which requires payment of a charge.

59. A method as claimed in claim 58, wherein the confirmation icon enables the user of the another one of the client devices to agree to pay for the pay content with a single operation.

60. A method as claimed in claim 59, further comprising

discounting, at the server, fees charged to the first one of the client devices for the pay content when the user of the another one of the client devices has agreed to pay for the pay content.

61. A method as claimed in claim 59, further comprising providing, at the server, incentive points to the first one of the client devices when the user of the another one of the client devices has agreed to pay for the pay content.

62. A method as claimed in claim 59, further comprising sending agreement-to-pay information from the another one of the client devices to the server when the user of the another one of the client devices has agreed to pay for the pay content.

63. A method as claimed in claim 58, further comprising sending further icon identification data from the server to the another one of the client devices when the user of the another one of the client devices has not agreed to pay for the pay content, the further icon identification data identifying an icon at the another one of the client devices for urging the user of the another one of the client devices to pay for the pay content.

64. A method as claimed in claim 57, further comprising charging, at the server, fees for the pay content for the another one of the client devices to the first one of the client devices when the request indicates that a user of the first one of the client devices has agreed to pay the fees for the pay content for the another one of the client devices.

65. A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the pay

content is pay per view.

66. A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the pay content is video on demand.

67. A method as claimed in claim 55, further comprising:

searching, by the server, for an online device having a user who is the same as the user of the another one of the client devices when the another one of the client devices is not online; and

sending from the server to the online device an invitation to watch the selected content.

68. A method as claimed in claim 55, further comprising exchanging chat text between client devices in a chat group, wherein the icon identification data is transmitted from the first one of the client devices to other client devices in the chat group.

69. A method as claimed in claim 50, wherein the step of displaying the icon buttons includes displaying the icon buttons superimposed on the content.